

6 months to a year. It turned into a 52 year stint. From 1954 to 2006, the North Dakota Air National Guard flew alert in more than a dozen states and nearly a dozen nations.

In 1998 the Happy Hooligans established a permanent alert detachment of F-16s, pilots and ground crews at Langley Air Force Base in Virginia. Their mission was to provide air defense for Washington, DC, and other locations along the eastern seaboard. That mission came to an end on October 12, 2006.

I cannot talk about the Happy Hooligans alert mission without mentioning the events of 9/11.

The attack on the World Trade Center in New York precipitated an order for the fighters of 119th Fighter Wing's alert detachment to scramble from Langley. Three North Dakota Air National Guard F-16s took to the air, but regrettably they were not yet over Washington's airspace when American Airlines flight 77 hit the Pentagon. They were still some minutes away. But they then flew, as I understand it, 7 or 8 hours that day performing combat air patrol over the skies of Washington, DC.

In the shock of that morning, I have to tell you that I will never forget what it meant to look up to the bright blue September morning sky and see F-16 fighter planes flying air cover over the Nation's Capitol. We found out later those were the Happy Hooligans from Fargo, ND.

The Happy Hooligans are folks who farm; run drug stores; teach school. They do a lot of things in their community. But they also are members of an Air National Guard unit that maintains and flies aircraft. And they do that better than anybody.

For almost 60 years the Happy Hooligans have ranked with the best fighter pilots in the world. They have flown in contests against the world's top combat pilots, and they have brought the trophies home to Fargo, ND, as proof that they are the best fighter pilots in the world.

Several years ago, USA Today wrote about the Happy Hooligans. It called them the "Godfathers of air superiority." It said, "When you strap one of these senior fliers into the cockpit of an F-16 Fighting Falcon, the younger boys get out of the way because these are the best air-to-air combat fighters in the world."

That article was about one of the three times that the 119th Fighter Wing won the Air Force's William Tell competition.

William Tell is the U.S. Air Force's foremost air-to-air competition. It is the Super Bowl of air superiority. F-16 units are not supposed to win it. Reserve component units are not supposed to win it. F-15 teams from active Air Force wings are supposed to win it. But someone must have forgotten to tell this to the Happy Hooligans.

So this National Guard unit from Fargo, ND, has taken its airplanes to the William Tell contest, and they

have flown against the world's top combat pilots, and they have brought the William Tell Award home to Fargo, ND, three times, as proof that they are the best fighter pilots in the world.

The Happy Hooligans have also won the Hughes Trophy twice. That award recognizes the outstanding air-to-air unit in the country. It too has been dominated by F-15s. The 119th is the only F-16 unit that has ever won it.

Alongside their flying record, the Happy Hooligans also have an unmatched safety record.

Since 1973, they have flown more than 150,000 hours in F-101s, F-4s and F-16s without a single major accident. That amount of flight time translates to about 17 accident-free years in the air.

That is the longest continuous period of safe fighter aircraft operations for any Air National Guard fighter unit and one of best safety records in U.S. Air Force history. In March 2006, the 119th Fighter Wing was recognized for flying its F-16s for a total of 70,000 hours in 3,920 individual sorties without mishap. That is also a record.

All those trophies and records are a testament to the thousands of men and women who have served in the North Dakota Air National Guard since 1947. The pilots make the headlines but they would not get off the ground without all the other people in the unit.

U.S. defense policy is changing, and the role of the Happy Hooligans is going to change with it.

But make no mistake about it: the 119th Wing will still lead the way, doing its job for America.

The Happy Hooligans are going to accept their new missions of controlling unmanned aerial vehicles and flying the future Joint Cargo Aircraft with the same enthusiasm and professionalism as they flew fighters. And they will perform those missions better than anyone else in the country. Because that is the way they do everything.●

HONORING CORTLANDT DIETLER

● Mr. SALAZAR. Mr. President, I would like to recognize Cortlandt Dietler, a great Coloradan who tonight is receiving the National Western Stock Show's 2007 Citizen of the West award. This is an honor befitting a man whose life and career exemplify the Western values of independence, hard work, and humility.

A native Coloradan, Cort is a pioneer in the oil industry and has helped make Denver an energy center for our Nation. He began his career with ARAMCO in Lebanon in 1947, and has been involved with more than 30 energy companies since, many of which he has led or has founded. Today, he is the chairman of TransMontaigne Inc, a petroleum product distribution and marketing company which he founded. He is so respected in his industry that his peers have honored him repeatedly; in 1976 the Denver Petroleum Club named

him the Oil Man of the Year, in 1986 the Colorado Petroleum Association named him the Pioneer Oil Man of the Year, and in 2003 the Independent Petroleum Association of the Mountain States selected him as the Wildcatter of the Year.

I have known Cort to be a spirited contributor to his community. He lends his expertise to organizations like the Denver Art Museum, the El Pomar Foundation, and the Buffalo Bill Memorial Association. He is generous as a philanthropist and has a candid voice on the shared challenges we face.

While Cort has worked primarily in the oil industry, he has also worked in ranching and with the National Western Stock Show for many years. He and a partner ran a cattle operation in the Eagle River Valley, near Vail, and bred thoroughbreds for racing.

He is being honored today because he epitomizes the values which are so central to Western life—he has worked hard, acted ethically, and served his community with humility and honor. Cort belongs among the select group of leaders who have received this award, and I congratulate him on this honor.●

MESSAGES FROM THE PRESIDENT

Messages from the President of the United States were communicated to the Senate by Ms. Evans, one of his secretaries.

EXECUTIVE MESSAGES REFERRED

As in executive session the Presiding Officer laid before the Senate messages from the President of the United States submitting sundry nominations which were referred to the appropriate committees.

(The nominations received today are printed at the end of the Senate proceedings.)

MESSAGE FROM THE HOUSE

At 5:43 p.m., a message from the House of Representatives, delivered by Ms. Niland, one of its reading clerks, announced that the House has passed the following bill, in which it requests the concurrence of the Senate:

H.R. 2. An act to amend the Fair Labor Standards Act of 1938 to provide for an increase in the Federal minimum wage.

ENROLLED BILL SIGNED

The President pro tempore (Mr. BYRD) reported that he had signed the following enrolled bill, which was previously signed by the Speaker of the House:

S. 159. An act to redesignate the White Rocks National Recreation Area in the State of Vermont as the "Robert T. Stafford White Rocks National Recreation Area".

MEASURES READ THE FIRST TIME

The following bill was read the first time: